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ABSTRACT

The research literature on the effects of television on the behavior and attitudes of children shows that most television programs and commercials present a highly distorted view of life and society and show discrimination in character roles with regard to sex and race. Above everything, American commercial television is violent and children represent an extremely large viewing population. Research indicates that television viewing strongly affects children in such areas as creativity, role models, cognitive development, and aggressive-violent behavior. Attitudes toward commercials tend to become more negative as children become older, but tolerance increases with the amount of television watched. The purchasing patterns of families with younger children appear to be affected by commercials. Much publicly-supported children's television programming is cognitively focused, but, despite its apparent success, public commitment to children's television shows little improvement. Child-created television, in which children produce their own programming, provides an alternative model to present practices and allows children's television to program "real" problem situations while controlling for anti-social behavior models. (CWM)

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THROUGH THE TUBE DARKLY

A Review of the literature on the effects of television on the behavior and attitudes of children, and a proposal for an alternative child-television relationship.

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THROUGH THE TUBE DARKLY

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Above everything, American commercial television is violent. In his review of a series of studies prepared for the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), George Comstock refers to Gerbner's (1972) analysis of the amount of violence in television programming from 1967, when the major U.S. networks pledged, in response to public pressure, to curb violence in programming aimed at children. Gerbner's analysis is not reassuring. Not only was there no significant reduction in violence, but its quality tended to reinforce the notion of the young, white, affluent, fashionable American male as the pillar of power, justice and virtue.

Gerbner studied Saturday morning and evening prime time programming. Although there appeared to have been a slight decline in the violent content of all programming, there was a substantial increase in network programs aimed specifically at children--cartoons--between 1967 and 1969. Liebert, Neale and Davidson (1973) quote the following words from the same Gerbner report. "By 1969, with a violent episode at least every two minutes in all Saturday morning cartoon programming . . . the average

cartoon hour had nearly six times the violence rate of the average adult television drama hour, and nearly 12 times the violence rate of the average movie hour" (p. 24). In 1954, according to Liebert et al., "children's programming contained only three times as much violence as adult drama." Furthermore, cartoons have steadily increased their share of all television programming, according to Gerbner.

Gerbner feels that Network TV drama (the second most violent category of programming heavily watched by children) reflects and feeds a national mythology. This mythology is fed by the unreality of human roles and dramatic situations whether violent or not, and by the "social order of television" as determined by dramatic violence: who perpetrates it, for what purposes, on whom, and to what consequence. Adult males are more violent than women; retribution for violence typically befalls low income, blue collar, frequently non-white or foreign males whose original violence is committed "unjustly." The retribution is often more grizzly than what it is punishing, meted out in the cause of "justice" but frequently outside the law. Fully half of all leading characters in network prime time drama commit violence, according to Gerbner, but the number of victims is even more numerous. While the suffering of violence often occurs as retribution, an equally significant amount afflicts the innocent. Violence is the most effective means of goal attainment in television drama, and these goals are normally related to the private acquisition of wealth or power.

The stereotypical world of television drama is very much at odds with events in the real world. For example, television violence rarely hurts. TV crime usually occurs in unfamiliar places between

complete strangers. Minority people are typically cast as misfits, criminals or, as Liebert puts it, "regulators"--defenders of an affluent and racially white dominated status quo. The meaning of "crime" itself is narrowly defined in television drama. It is related to action, vengeance, spectacular social and psychological deviations; rarely to corporate price fixing or the political abuse of power. Human roles are no less unreal or stereotypical. Doctors treat exotic diseases, never hemorroids; lawyers tackle exotic cases employing unorthodox tactics. The high status professions are overrepresented, suggesting that the jobs in which most of us find ourselves are either nonexistent or unimportant. Women are portrayed, according to Marya Mannes, in four basic stereotypes: "the gorgeous teen-age swinger with bouncing locks; the young mother teaching her baby girl the right soap for skin care; the middle-aged housewife with a voice like a power saw; the old lady with dentures and irregularity" (quoted in Liebert et al., p. 118).

Neither women nor ethnic minorities fare better in TV commercials. The National Organization for Women (NOW) reports that of 1200 commercials studied, a scant 0.3 percent "showed women as autonomous people leading independent lives of their own" (quoted in Liebert et al., 1973). Barcus (1971) discovered a heavy bias in favor of maleness and ethnic whiteness in ads aimed at children. Of 132 commercials viewed in Boston on a typical Saturday morning, 49 contained males only, a mere 16 females only. "In addition, characters in toy ads usually are identified by sex roles, with girls playing with dolls, and boys with cars, planes and other mechanical devices" (p. vii).

Liebert and his associates note, "indeed, the best documented fact

about television is that it is violent" (p. 23). Furthermore, it presents a highly distorted view of life and society. It raises crude issues and resolves them with equal crudity, usually violent. While commercial television may not reflect real events, it may very well reflect real social values. Cedrick Clark (1972) believes that television specializes in images acceptable to America's dominant classes--that it enjoys a mutually supportive relationship with the powerful--and Gerbner feels that fictional TV constitutes the American social ideology in the garb of fantasy, and that the relative status of various groups of Americans is depicted primarily through violence: who acts and who is acted upon; who wields power and who bends to it. The effects of all these characteristics of commercial television are only partially known. Comstock, however, asserts "that those who believe that the mass media have some effect--that they are imitated, learned from, or taken as a guide for behavior and attitudes--and believe that the mass media should contribute to social harmony will not be happy with television's portrayal of the world" (p. 2).

Public television provides a different model. Even here, however, achievement has not appeared to live up to potential when comparisons are made with publicly supported television systems in other western nations (Fleiss and Ambrosino, 1972, p. 101). Public television in America has always suffered from poor funding, but in spite of the dismal overall picture, some excellent examples of children's programming have been produced. The effects of "Sesame Street" in particular have been extensively examined. Considerable research and development went into "Sesame Street" before the first program was aired, and it has

continued ever since. Unlike the programming for children found on the commercial networks, "Sesame Street" has developed out of a close consultative relationship between producers and specialists in child development and education (Cantor, 1972; Lesser, 1972).

"Sesame Street" has a heavy cognitive orientation (although the balance has shifted somewhat toward affectively oriented content) and is goal specific, seeking to help children develop the following learning skills: letter, number, form and body part recognition, matching, sorting, relationships, and classification. In its second year, "Sesame Street" added sight reading and attitude formation to its list of objectives. Ball and Bogatz of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) conducted a research program to measure the degree to which certain categories of viewing children were meeting program goals (1970, 1971). For their evaluation of the first year, a sample of 950 preschool age children underwent a six month treatment of program viewing either at home or in a nursery school setting. The sample included children from a mix of demographic areas, and was, at the end of treatment, divided into four quartiles according to the amount of "Sesame Street" they watched.

In sum, the results showed that the greater the amount of "Sesame Street" viewed, the greater the gain on post tests for children in all eight learning categories for which objectives were established. Gains in letter and number recognition were the most dramatic (Ball and Bogatz, 1970, p. 3). Gains were recorded across all categories of age, sex, geographical location, socioeconomic status, and I.Q. Home viewers improved more than school viewers. The researchers attribute the relatively poor school performance to resentment of the teachers in

whose classrooms the research was conducted; they felt, according to Ball and Bogatz, that the research program was taking too much time from regular classroom activities. The involvement of parents in the children's viewing appeared to produce positive associations. Ball and Bogatz report that "Children who watched 'Sesame Street' the most--and hence learned the most--tended to have mothers who often watched the show with them and often talked to them about it" (p. 11). This suggests that the participation of parents in the television viewing of young children can be a definite advantage. A follow-up investigation of "Sesame Street's" second year revealed that the results obtained for the first year still held firm. The second year research format was altered somewhat to include program material concentrating on sight reading and attitude development toward race, school and other people, and the sample was restricted to urban disadvantaged children. Results showed that the heavier viewers were more socially adaptable and had developed more favorable attitudes toward school and other races. They were also better prepared for school, according to ratings of the teachers in the schools in which the sample children enrolled, and displayed a superior development of vocabulary (Liebert et al., pp. 107-108).

"Sesame Street," however, has not enjoyed unanimous acclaim. It has been criticized for its too-heavy cognitive focus, its emphasis on rote learning, its blandness, and its aping of the high-pressure production techniques of commerical television. Dr. Frank Garfunkel of Boston University suggests that "Sesame Street" should concentrate more heavily on "spontaneous classroom situations with 'real' children exploring

their environment, interacting and dealing with problems [and] have a children's theatre group perform established scripts . . . and also originate new material around chainging themes" (quoted in Urrows, 1971, p. 8). John Holt (1971) feels that "Sesame Street" is too teacher-oriented and presents material too sophisticated for the age level of child to which the series is targeted. Holt urges that "Sesame Street" move away from the rote learning of skills and the preparation of children for school and instead think of itself as a school which helps children to learn "from the world around them" (p. 78). Other critics have asserted that "Sesame Street" is more appropriate to white middle class children than to urban minority children. Indeed, Ball and Bogatz themselves found that among the sample of children who comprised their first evaluation, the advantaged "watched more of [Sesame Street], on the average, than any of the groups of disadvantaged children" (p. 10). This, however, would appear to result from a complexity of factors beyond the content of the program itself. Springle (1972) has conducted research which would appear to contradict the positive results reported by Ball and Bogatz; he was comparing the effectiveness of "Sesame Street" with a Head Start curriculum as a tool for achieving "Sesame Street" objectives. Springle was working with a very small sample, however, and his research depends on independent variables (Head Start curricula) which are idiosyncratic to local circumstances. "Sesame Street," however cannot be all things to all people. In terms of its own objectives, the evidence strongly points to the program's success.

"Sesame Street" is only one, highly visible, example of well-received, publicly-supported children's television programming. It,

along with "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," is aimed at preschoolers. Two nationally broadcast programs are produced for elementary school children: "Zoom," a Boston-based production in which a rather elite group of elementary school age children perform but assume no other production responsibilities, and "The Electric Company," another CTW production whose explicit purpose is to improve reading skills. A limited number of other regional and national children's series are now appearing on public television aimed at specific age groups, linguistic minorities, and so on. But the total American public commitment to children's television is still distressingly low, and does not appear to be improving. The funding for "Zoom" was cut in the spring of 1975 and the program staff in Boston have been dismissed. Until the advent of "The Electric Company," there was not a single nationally broadcast program for children older than preschool age. Deverell (1973) notes the still existing paucity of programs "that take the real viewing patterns of 7 - 9 year olds seriously" (p. 5). Fleiss and Ambrosino have reported the same thing (p. 124). Deverell also reports on the results of a questionnaire in which parents and educators strongly called for programming focusing on children's moral development, self-concept, and the expansion of their experiential horizons (p. 13). Only one American national program, "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," seriously addresses these matters. Deverell also notes that most non-commercial children's programming is cognitively focused, and concentrates on the urban child, thus tending to ignore the rich diversity of the north American cultural mosaic.

Perhaps the most serious misgivings about non-commercial children's

programming stem from the evidence of its poor viewership. Jack Lyle writes, "All the studies containing pertinent data agree that educational programs are hardly watched at all by the vast majority of the population, adult and child. The sole possible exception seems to be 'Sesame Street' among younger children" (p. 12). Deverell concurs (p. 6). The apparent appeal of such offerings as the ill-fated but highly acclaimed "Zoom" may be increasing the viewing audience, but too little data were available for evidence at the time of "Zoom's" demise. The American public has become conditioned to expect mindless entertainment from television, and to find self-improvement elsewhere. Because children's viewing patterns tend to follow those of their parents (Lyle and Hoffman, 1972), it is not surprising that children tend to resist ETV viewing. A more widespread and substantial public commitment to television broadcasting is needed before inroads into America's television viewing patterns can be expected.

The saturation of violence in prime time commercial television programming would not be so troubling were it not for the fact that children are extremely heavy prime time viewers. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) report that a typical sixth grader watches about 30 hours of television per week, roughly the same amount of time as is spent in school (p. 137). Lyle further declares that sixth graders continue to be present in the television audience much later than 9:00 PM (p. 7). Lyle and Hoffman also discovered that one-third of the 12 year olds they interviewed regularly watched until after 10:00 PM, suggesting "that many older elementary students are in the audience through most of the prime time period" (Lyle, p. 7). These findings have been corroborated

by Deverell's Canadian study (p. 6). Fleiss and Ambrosino affirm that elementary pupils view the most heavily on weekday evenings, followed by weekday afternoons, then Saturday mornings. Even now, children's programming on weekday evenings or afternoons on the commercial networks is highly limited (Barthel, 1975).

Virtually every American home has a television set; many homes have more than one. Liebert et al. (p. 9) cite data which show that the viewing of school children peaks at age 12, but Looney (1971) indicates that the average preschooler watches 54 hours a week (p. 55). Chaffee and McLeod (1972) have found that children model their viewing habits after their parents and elder siblings in terms of program preference and quantity of use. This is consistent with evidence of distinct subcultural viewing patterns; blue collar families tend to view more than white collar, minority families more than white (Lyle and Hoffman, p. 138). Labelling today's American child the "television child," then, is no exaggeration; children, with their "limited alternatives for information and limited experience with life" appear indeed to be the "susceptible audience" described by Comstock (p. 2).

Murray (1972) reports that children, by the time they reach five or six years of age, have developed well established and predictable viewing patterns. According to the recent report to the United States Surgeon-General (1972), children up to the first grade level prefer cartoons and family situation comedies; sixth graders still enjoy sitcoms, but have added a strong taste for "adventure" shows (e.g., "Mod Squad"); by the time they have reached the tenth grade, "adventure" programs retain a high priority, but music and variety shows are also

highly popular. Deverell, and Lyle and Hoffman have noted that children demonstrate a strong preference for television characters of their own ethnic and racial background. For example, half the black children interviewed by Deverell in 1973 cited "Flip Wilson" or "Sanford and Son" as their favorite television programs. White children failed to mention these two programs at all (p. 8).

Who is responsible for the production of children's television programming in America? Muriel Cantor talked to key production personnel responsible for commercial network children's programming. She interviewed twenty-four producers and script writers for programs broadcast primarily on Saturday mornings. Although most of these individuals were not in the direct employ of the networks, Cantor believes that the networks exercise the strongest influence over the content of children's programming. She cites two major reasons. The networks are the paymasters of the producers and script writers, and the structure of the networks is such that the input of other potential influences is inhibited, in particular, feedback from the ultimate consumers: parents and children. The orientation of the commercial networks is economic; therefore, the only feedback from the field that is important to them is audience size. Thus the individuals responsible for production are forced to be more sensitive to audience ratings than to other factors.

Although the networks provide the greatest influence over program content, Cantor does not believe that the individuals behind production are mere pawns for network goals; their own occupational milieu and personal values are also important. She found that none among those she interviewed had any academic or professional training or background

that would prepare them for anything but the purely technical requirements of producing television programming for children. Not only were they themselves not appropriately trained, but they consistently failed to consult with other professionals who were. (This failure appears to be peculiar to American commercial children's television. Fleiss and Ambrosino found that in all of the twelve western European countries they studied, plus Canada and Japan, producers of children's programming consulted extensively with professionals in various fields related to child development.) The interviewees generally disclaimed responsibility for the potentially harmful effects of their work on children, believing this to be the responsibility of parents, and there was strong consensus among them that the main objective of their craft was to get and retain the attention of children. The most effective means for this, they felt, was through violence. Thus the few existing influences and controls affecting children's commercial programming are internal to the networks; there appears to be little or no external accountability.

Cantor's observations are reinforced by the findings of Baldwin and Lewis (1972) who interviewed forty-eight senior network executives involved in the production of evening prime time shows judged to be particularly violent. Among those interviewed were six network censors. Baldwin and Lewis concluded that censorship of violence is internally exercised by individuals who appear to be more concerned with the common denominator of public taste than on the potential effects of program content. On the role of social scientists, one censor said, "We laugh at them. I don't see how the work accomplished so far by social

scientists is of any practical value" (p. 295). Like the producers and script writers of children's television, the censors believe that the main responsibility for the effects of programming rests with parents. They tend to be critical of parents who, they feel, generally fail to exercise this responsibility effectively. In any case, they believe, televised violence is not harmful because it is usually punished. That violence is normally punished with equal or greater violence has not seemed to modify this opinion.

The individuals behind children's programming on public television are quite different. The extent to which the producers of "Sesame Street" collaborated with researchers and educators is described in detail by Lesser (1972, pp. 232-272). As we have seen, CTW has also been careful to draw on the skills of established outside researchers for evaluation. The same quality, if not quantity, of collaboration characterizes the work of Fred Rogers' "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" (Rogers, 1971; Rogers and Wren, 1974).

Just as "Sesame Street" has helped children achieve explicit learning objectives, Ball and Bogatz also report evidence of incidental learning. Indeed, most learning from television is incidental, as Nicholas Johnson has stressed. "All television is educational television," he wrote. "It may not teach the truth. It may preach violence rather than love. It may give more emphasis to the quantity of acquisition than to the quality of use. It may produce more mental illness than health. But it teaches. Endlessly. Soap operas, commercials, prime-time series shows: each has its lesson" (1970, p. 94). Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) found that children do not turn to television when

they wish to learn; for this, they use the print media (p. 69). This helps explain the chronically small audience for educational television.

Lyle and Hoffman report that first graders display a considerable amount of behavior modelled on television shows in social play (p. 173-174). The types of programs used as models appeared to be adventure shows, situation comedies and westerns. As Schramm et al. have pointed out, it is the most significant body of information common to all children. Thus, television is certainly a socializing medium, and the role of school and the family in socializing children has been partially usurped by TV. The adolescents studied by Schramm et al. reported that television helped them learn how to cope with personal problems, and to know what behavior, dress, and hair styles are appropriate to certain social situations. It was also reported that television provides a significant topic of conversation for children of all ages. While television's contribution to children's sociability cannot be entirely negative, it should be remembered that if television is providing a major topic of conversation for children, then it is also defining, to some degree, the parameters of discussion by the nature of its programming.

Only limited research has been focused on the affective learning of children from television. Fred Rogers chides the commercial networks for deliberately and systematically playing on children's fears to get and keep their attention. He feels that producers exploit the dark areas of children's feelings without helping them openly own, understand or resolve them. Rogers sees children's fears, in part, as situational. For the future, he envisions the development of television

programming for specific child audiences and for specialized purposes: dealing with death of family members or loved ones, or divorce; preparing children for hospital procedures or the first day of school. Such programming, some of which has already been produced, would be locally available through videotape storage, and playable over the appropriate cable or closed circuit television systems. Other writers (e.g., Deverell) have also called for increased emphasis on television programming dealing with the affective development of children.

Stanley Stern (1973) has produced evidence that heavy viewing of most types of television programming has a depressing effect on the creativity of bright children. With a sample of 250 gifted fourth, fifth and sixth grade suburban middle class children, Stern pre and post tested for score changes on a battery of tests drawn from Guilford. Comparisons among children were made according to the type of programming they were instructed to watch for a period of three weeks. The programming types were: educational television, cartoons, sports, comedy, drama, and a mixture of all categories. The seventh group was given no instructions and served as a control. The children were not told in advance how much television to view, but they were asked to keep a viewing log. Naturally, there was some variation in the amount of television watched, perhaps more than the logs indicated. Stern's findings are disturbing. In all viewing categories, with the exception of drama but including ETV, the post tests showed a decline in scores. The greatest decline was recorded for the children who viewed cartoons. Younger children appeared to be more adversely affected than their elder counterparts; boys and girls were affected equally. If an

important goal of education is the development of divergent thinking in children, then television does not appear to be meeting it.

Much of the research on the relationship between children and television has been concentrated on the effects of violent program content. The National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) conducted an extensive research effort in 1970 and 1971, the results of which were published in 1972 and were supposed to have provided the data for the U. S. Surgeon-General's report on the effects of televised violence, published later. Defining the term "violence" has presented a persistent problem for research. Gerbner defines the term as "the overt expression of physical force against others or self, or the compelling of action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed" (Comstock, p. 4). Cedrick Clark defines the term more liberally, suggesting that it should include the systematic assault or failure to enhance the self-esteem of individuals or groups. Clark believes that television portrays minority groups and the powerless in a way that does violence to them. What we have discussed so far about the nature of television content would certainly support Clark's thesis. Although there is an academic problem of definition, lay people appear to have little difficulty in coming to a common recognition of televised violence. A sample of 350 Detroit residents surveyed by Greenberg and Gordon (1972) reached very close consensus on which, among sixty-five television offerings, were the most violent.

There have been three basic types of study examining the relationship between children and televised violence: laboratory studies, correlational field studies, and experimental field studies (Liebert et

al., pp. 51-87). The overwhelming weight of evidence in all three categories has pointed to a distinct positive relationship between the exposure of children to televised violence and aggressive behavior and attitudes.

Albert Bandura was among the first to investigate the observational learning by children of filmed aggressive models. He and his colleagues have consistently discovered that the viewing of violent filmed content in a lab setting has resulted in imitative behavior (e.g., striking a Bozo doll). In one experiment, Bandura manipulated his independent variables so that there was either reward, punishment, or no consequence for the aggressive behavior of his models. Although children viewing the punished model demonstrated fewer subsequent aggressive responses, it was found that even these children, when rewarded, will imitate the model's aggressive behavior. Bandura's work focused on the acquisition and acceptance of aggressive behavior within a very short time span of exposure to filmed material. Hicks demonstrated that these same behaviors are substantially retained up to eight months after exposure (Liebert et al., pp. 39-54).

The point has been made that aggression against a Bozo clown is qualitatively different from aggression against a human being. Normal social sanctions, the argument goes, would inhibit such behavior. A study by Hanratty, Liebert, Morris and Fernandez (1969) shows that, to the contrary, children will imitate the aggressive behavior of a filmed model against human victims. Four- and five-year old boys were shown a film clip of an adult male aggressing against an adult human clown. The children were divided into three groups: one placed in a room with

a Bozo clown; the second with an adult dressed as a clown; and the third, which did not view the clip, with an adult clown. Both experimental groups subsequently displayed aggressive imitative behavior. No aggression was displayed by children in the control group. The fact that the target for the children in the second group was a person did not inhibit aggression (Liebert et al., 1973).

Most of the violent behavior viewed in normal home television programming could not be directly imitated by children. Therefore, various studies have examined the relationship between televised violence and the disinhibition of generalized aggressive behavior. They have shown that the viewing of violent film material is associated with a greater tendency to cause physical harm by such means as (ostensibly) inflicting electric shocks on another person for making mistakes on a test. Although it has been found that adult subjects with past histories of aggression are more likely to inflict harm than those without such histories, the question is only one of degree. A similar study conducted with five to nine year old boys produced similar results, and an observed increase in aggressive play among the subjects exposed to filmed violence (Liebert and Baron, 1972).

The suggestion has been made that exposure to short film clips is sufficiently different from watching whole TV programs that the results in one situation are not transferable to the other. Liefer and Roberts (1972) exposed 271 children ranging from kindergarten through grade twelve to entire television programs high in violent content. They found that those in the experimental condition were more likely than those in the control group to choose physical aggression as

opposed to constructive behavior as the appropriate response to the aggressive behavior of another person. It has also been claimed that results from lab studies cannot be generalized to the real world. In a lab setting, children attend more closely to the presentation of filmed or televised material than is the case at home, where it is known that television viewing is often interrupted by conversation, temporary departures from the room, and so on (Lyle and Hoffman; Schramm, Lyle and Parker). Furthermore, the lab environments in which viewer responses are elicited are unrealistically contrived. Various investigators have undertaken field studies which deal with these very objections. McIntyre and Teevan (1972) examined the relationship between the viewing habits of twenty-three hundred junior and senior high school students, and antisocial behavior. Subjects listed their favorite four television programs and submitted self-reports on their own social behavior and attitudes. Significant statistical relationships were found between high violence viewing, and social deviance and favorable attitudes toward deviance. The greater the amount of violence viewed, the greater the deviance and antisocial attitudes. Greenberg (1972) reports then similar studies by Robinson and Bachman; Dominick and Greenberg; and McLeod, Atkin and Chaffee (1972) have all produced similar results.

One of the most significant field studies undertaken to date is one by Lefkowitz, Eron, Walder, and Huesmann (1972) investigating the long term relationship (ten years) between children's television viewing patterns and aggressive behavior as young adults. At the beginning of the study, measures were taken on 875 third graders on the viewing of violent television (as reported by mothers), and aggressive behavior

(as reported by peers). At this time, significant positive relationships were found for boys, but not for girls. Ten years later when the experimental subjects were nineteen years old, 460 of the original group were similarly examined again. Violence viewing was self-reported; aggression was rated by peers. A significant and positive relationship was found between the high violence viewers at age eight and the display of aggressive behavior at age nineteen. The reverse, however, did not hold true; that is, there was no relationship between those who displayed aggressive behavior at age eight and high violence viewing at age nineteen. From this, it was concluded that there existed a distinct causal, long term relationship between viewing a high degree of violent television as children, and aggression as young adults. Had the connection simply been correlational, significant positive relationships would have been found both ways.

Another interesting field study is reported by Stein and Freidrich (1972). Ninety-seven nursery school children were examined over a period of nine weeks. The group was divided into three treatments: viewing aggressive television material, viewing prosocial material ("Mister Rogers' Neighborhood"), or viewing neutral fare. The children's behavior was observed during free play and classroom time by observers who were blind to the experimental conditions. Children who watched the more aggressive programming demonstrated higher levels of aggression in their interpersonal behavior than those who viewed the prosocial or neutral programming. These results held only for those with an initial predisposition for aggression. It was also found that children in the prosocial viewing condition showed a greater ability to cope with

frustrating situations than those in the other two viewing categories.

The most violent television programming (cartoons and adult prime-time drama) is broadcast at times when large numbers of children are watching (Lyle and Hoffman, p. 183). There is substantial evidence that modelling of television personalities occurs in real life, according to Lyle who writes, "Murray, Ward, and Lyle and Hoffman all found that children learn and repeat what they see on television at home. When asked if they ever 'played' things they saw on television, the majority of Lyle and Hoffman's first graders said that they did use television as a model for play with friends" (p. 19). The evidence for the causality of televised violence for aggressive behavior in children indeed now appears to be beyond question.

A large proportion of television air time is devoted to commercials. Ward and Wackman (1971a) report that "On the average, between one and two of every ten minutes is devoted to advertising" (pp. 415-416). Liebert et al. report that networks allocate double the advertising time on Saturday morning children's programming than during evening prime-time (p. 112). Local commercials swell this proportion even further. According to Barcus (1971), on a typical Saturday morning in Boston, commercial messages averaged one minute in five, and on one channel, it was one in four. Jennings (1970) has reported similar findings for New York City. Of the advertising directed at children, Choate (1972) remarks, half are for food products, about one-third for toys, and 10% for vitamins. Most of the food ads are for sweetened snack and cereal food, not for food naturally high in nutrition.

Barcus outlines some of the practices employed in advertising

directed at children. There are "Fairly clear examples of [commercials] which would tend to mislead a child in judging size, quantity, speed or other facets of a product. This can be done through camera angles, close-up photography, and speeded up action, among other techniques" (p. 45). Barcus feels that ads deceive as much by what they do not say (about the size of the product, age-specificity, materials of construction, durability, etc.) as by what they do. There is frequent repetition of the theme that the use of advertised product is "fun." Themes of personal popularity, group identification, power, speed, and noise are also common. Liebert et al. note that commercials are often attuned to program content; for example, ads for warlike toys frequently appear on programs with warlike themes.

Scott Ward (1971) and various colleagues conducted a series of studies to explore certain relationships between TV advertising and children. Small groups of children ranging from grades K through 6 were exposed to videotapes of Saturday morning programming, including commercials. The children were observed as they watched. The investigators found that there is generally a drop in the attention level of the child at the onset of the commercial. However, the drop is the least for the youngest children five to seven years old) and the greatest for the oldest (eleven and twelve). Commercials placed early in the program appear to command greater attention than those placed later. Ward, Levinson and Wackman indicate that children do learn from commercials. They write ". . . this learning [may be] relatively gradual, subtle, covert or unconscious. . . . Thus early learning may have important effects on later learning" (p. 1).

Blatt, Spencer and Ward report that older children tend to have more negative attitudes toward commercials than younger children; their comments concentrate more on the commercials themselves whereas younger children, when they comment at all, refer to the product advertised (p. 11). Children in the youngest group observed found it difficult to distinguish between commercials and program material, commercials and the product advertised, and commercials and reality. Kindergarten children were generally quite credulous about the truthfulness of the ads they saw, but "second grade children indicated a concrete distrust . . . , often based on experience with advertised products. Fourth graders exhibited mistrust for specific commercials and 'tricky' elements of commercials; sixth graders exhibited global mistrust, except, if probed, public service announcements (sic)" (Ward, p. 15). Regarding the affective responses of children to commercials, the investigators found that "Youngest children show some positive responses to the entertainment value of commercials; second graders have slightly negative associations . . . ; fourth graders exhibit distrust, but appear to enjoy humor (especially slapstick and sadistic); sixth graders . . . are generally contemptuous" (Ward, p. 15). It appears, then, that by the time he is seven years old, the typical child is at least vaguely aware of a systematic duplicity perpetrated against him by adults. Children's tolerance of commercials, however, according to Ward, increases with the amount of television watched, seeming to suggest a numbing effect of saturation television viewing.

Ward and Wackman (1971b) studied the relationship between television advertising and family purchasing patterns. Questionnaires were

mailed to 132 mothers in the Boston area, and the investigators' analysis was based on an 83 percent response. They found that mothers felt that commercials have a stronger influence on younger than on older children, and that younger children are more likely to try to influence mothers to buy advertised products. On the other hand, mothers reported that they were more likely to yield to the influence attempts of older children. It was felt that television advertising contributed to intra-family conflict, but Ward and Wackman felt that such conflict appeared to be "part of more general parent-child conflict problems" (Ward, p. 16). The investigators reported two other interesting observations: mothers who themselves spend a great deal of time watching television are more likely to yield to children's attempts to influence purchases, and mothers who restrict their children's viewing are less likely to yield.

The advertising industry is well aware of what it takes to make young children respond as desired to commercials. Its awareness appears to be mindlessly cynical. One executive has said, "When you sell a woman on a product and she goes into the store and finds your brand isn't in stock, she'll probably forget about it. But when you sell a kid on your product, if he can't get it, he will throw himself on the floor, stamp his feet and cry" (quoted in Liebert et al., p. 125). On this note, the study of Blatt, Ward and Spencer on the relationship between children's developmental level and their reaction to television advertising suggests that very young children are "impulsive, self-protective and submissive" and that these viewers "respond principally to the basic needs and fears, and tend to be most receptive to commercials

which demand, threaten, or use 'hard sell' commands to stimulate impulsive reactions" (p. 25).

If children have been shown to display antisocial behavior when exposed to antisocial televised models, then it should follow that the same would apply to prosocial models. The beneficial effects of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" on preschoolers have been demonstrated by Stein and Freidrich (see pp. 32-33). In another study, Baran (1974) exposed two groups of children, one low in self-esteem and the other high, to televised material in which both anti and prosocial behaviors were exhibited, unrewarded and unpunished. The children's behavior was observed during a twenty minute play period directly following the viewing. Baran found that "the low self-esteem children showed greater amounts of prosocial modeling than the high self-esteem children who had seen the same program. . . . Apparently, when presented with prosocial television models, even in the presence of aggressive models, these low self-esteem children chose to model the prosocial behaviors" (p. 47).

An earlier investigation by Bandura and McDonald (1963) demonstrates the effectiveness of observational learning as compared with operant conditioning in the acquisition of prosocial behavior. Children, aged from five to eleven, were divided into two groups: the first viewed live people making moral judgements; the second was conditioned to make "correct" moral judgements through the systematic administration of rewards. When later presented with hypothetical situations of their own, those exposed to the models made significantly more "correct" responses than the children having undergone the operant conditioning.

A study by Elliot and Vasta (1970) subjected groups of preschool

children to three experimental conditions. In the first, the children were exposed to a televised model displaying altruistic behavior. In the second, the model also acted altruistically, but was rewarded for his behavior. In the third, not only was the model rewarded, but an explanation about why he was rewarded was given. When they were later allowed to share pennies and candy, the children in the third condition displayed greater generosity than those in the second, who in turn displayed more than those in the first. The results of this study have significant implications for the participation of teachers and parents in the television viewing activities of their children.

Other studies have demonstrated the positive therapeutic potential of television. Bandura, Grusec and Menlove (1967) have shown that avoidance behavior (fear of dogs) could be extinguished in three- to five-year olds through exposure to a live model playing with a dog without adverse consequences. Later, Hill, Liebert and Mott (1968) replicated the study, using a filmed model, with similar results. O'Connor (1969) found that the social interaction of withdrawn preschoolers can be enhanced through exposure to televised child models displaying increased levels of interaction. Other studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of television as a tool for helping children learn self-control, and for curbing deviant behavior (Liebert et al., pp. 89-96). Baran summarizes the implications of these studies:

> These [prosocial] effects can be produced through the judicious use of television. The important question, however, is "where are the programs that present prosocial models engaging in prosocial behaviors?" The " Sesame Streets" and "Misteroger's Neighborhoods" are relatively few and far between. . . . Prosocial models are relatively absent on television; equally important . . . , antisocial models are consistently reinforced and rewarded on television (p. 50).

Is it, then, enough that commercial broadcasters do no harm? Might they not assume some responsibility for living up to the potential that is now demonstrably attainable?

Child-created television (children producing their own television programming with portable videotape recorders) provides an alternative model. It cannot by itself solve the problems surrounding excessive viewing by children, televised violence, or commercialism; nor can it guarantee the development of prosocial behaviors. It can, and does, however, engage children in activities that are essentially sociable. It encourages an activist approach to learning and use of television. Deverell interviewed concerned adults about children's television. They felt "it is important that children become aware of themselves as a resource (sic) for their own learning, creative and imaginative play, and entertainment. . . .Very little has been done with this concept on television" (p.20). Deverell is referring to one-way broadcast television.

Other critics from within and outside the television industry have made extensive commentary on the nature and effects of children's television. Garfunkel, as we have seen, called for a greater presence of children exploring "real" problems in natural classroom situations. What Garfunkel has called for is what the producers of "Zoom" tried to do in the context of nationally-broadcast television. Child-created television takes this notion a step further by demonstrating that groups of children between nine and thirteen years old can produce television programming using their own experiences and environments as a base for their activities. It has also demonstrated that local, community-based television delivery systems (CATV) could be used for specific, local-interest programming created by and for kids (LeBaron 1974 a,b, 1975). "Zoom" for all its

worth, demonstrated an important constraint of national broadcast television. National broadcasting creates a situation in which an elite and often precocious group of communicators who do not represent geographical diversity and local interest diffuse messages to masses of dispersed receivers.

Child-created television can meet other important needs. While public television has secured the input of highly-qualified professional educators and child development specialists in the creation of its children's programming, child-created television approaches this problem by seeking professional involvement at the grassroots level: the classroom teacher and other local professionals and citizens with a concern for children. National television is not able to draw on the resources of those professionals closest to the needs of individual children. Locally-based, child-produced television provides a viable television alternative which can draw on important local professional resources to meet the needs of each child. More important, perhaps, is the way in which this approach seeks to meet John Holt's objection to the adult orientation and didacticism of "Sesame Street." Among the most important goals of child-created television is that the child should be the center of focus by having him or her undertake the tasks of production and that, by doing so, learning and discovery is emphasized over teaching, and the audience child becomes the child producer.